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STRATEGY RESEARCH **PROJECT**

AN HISTORICAL EXAMINATION OF **INTERNATIONAL COALITIONS**

BY

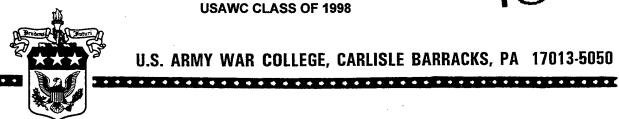
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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

An Historical Examination of International Coalitions

by

Keith Powell, II

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ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Keith Powell, II

TITLE: An Historical Examination of International Coalitions

FORMAT: Strategy Research Project

DATE: 06 April 1998 PAGES: 31 CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

The purpose of this study is to examine the formation and maintenance of international coalitions. It uses the Gulf War and the Anti-French/Napoleonic coalition of 1813-14 as case studies of successful examples of coalition formation and maintenance. It focuses on the need for all coalition partners to understand each other's strengths, weaknesses and true war aims, as well as the enemy's. The study also views coalition maintenance as a dynamic process that may change in keeping with changing circumstances for both partners and adversaries.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT iii
PREFACE V
AN HISTORICAL EXAMINATION OF INTERNATIONAL COALITIONS 1
DEFINITION OF TERMS
STAGES OF A COALITION: FORMATION
- CASE STUDY: GULF WAR COALITION6
STAGES OF A COALITION: MAINTENANCE
- CASE STUDY: ANTI-NAPOLEONIC COALITION
CONCLUSIONS
ENDNOTES 23
BIBLIOGRAPHY 25

PREFACE

Coalitions have come together throughout history. Fractious Greek City-states joined to fight the Persians. Imperial Rome and several groups of "barbarian states" came together to fight Atilla at the Battle of Chalons. The United States won its independence as part of a coalition with France and Spain.

Napoleon was finally defeated by the third in a series of Anti-French coalitions.

While the United States likes to imagine it can act unilaterally in the international arena (and often has done so in the Western Hemisphere,) the fact is that in both peace and war the United States has never been as isolationist or independent as myth would have it. In the majority of wars that the United States has fought, it has been part of a larger coalition. The United States usually, but not always, has been the dominant partner. Certainly, in this century, coalition fighting has been the norm and, if the Gulf War and its aftermath are any indication, there will be more in the future.

Given the seeming contradiction that the United States prefers to act alone, but usually acts in concert with other nations, it is important that U.S. decision makers have a firm understanding of the conditions that lead to a successful coalition. This paper will examine what constitutes a coalition; what factors encourage the participation of various partners; and what factors keep a coalition together, particularly as it nears its goals?

While drawing on numerous historical examples, this paper will focus on the Gulf War coalition and the last of the anti-Napoleonic coalitions as examples of the process of coalition formation and maintenance.

AN HISTORICAL EXAMINATION OF INTERNATIONAL COALITIONS

On February 27, 1991, after six weeks of air combat and 100 hours of ground offensive, the U.S.-led coalition announced the fulfillment of all objectives in the liberation of Kuwait and declared a cease-fire in the Gulf War against Iraq. The successful formation, maintenance and victory of the Anti-Iraq Coalition were, perhaps, the greatest successes of the Bush presidency. Indeed, it was a classic example of the formation and maintenance of a large-scale international coalition.

There seems to be a general acceptance that the Gulf War pattern will be duplicated to a greater or lesser degree in the future. Official U.S. policy statements, such as the National Security Strategy and the National Military Strategy, indicate that the United States prefers to participate in multinational operations.¹

A successful political coalition does not, of course, guarantee military success on the battlefield. However, since the United States finds comfort in the company of others, using international participation as a factor in encouraging domestic support, then forming and maintaining that coalition becomes an obvious strategic, as well as operational, center of gravity in

the course of conflict.² A coalition that dissolves at some critical moment invites disaster. What then is a coalition, how is it brought together and how is it kept together?

Definition of Terms

I distinguish between an alliance and a coalition. There seems to be a general understanding, but no specifically agreed upon definition of each term, and the two are often used interchangeably. For the purpose of this study, the key difference has to do with the temporary nature of the association. An alliance, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty or the Australia/New Zealand/United States Security Treaty (ANZUS), implies a long-term connection over a range of concerns. It is most often implemented by means of a formal agreement or treaty. In terms of international relations and, specifically, war planning, it usually means some degree of combined training and institutional connections that facilitate combined action in time of crisis.

A <u>coalition</u>, on the other hand, is a coming together of parties for a specific, generally time-limited, goal. When that objective is achieved or circumstances change substantially, the

coalition naturally dissolves. As such, it is a less formal, ad hoc grouping. Coalitions also may involve nations who have little in common or who might be adversaries under other circumstances, but who obtain mutual benefit in cooperation for a particular matter. 4 For example, we speak of the Grand Alliance in World War II, but in reality it was a coalition made up primarily of the United States, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, together with lesser powers, and the British Empire that defeated the Axis powers. The individual states did not entirely trust each other (including the U.S. and Britain, in terms of Mediterranean versus cross-Channel strategy, or the U.S. Pacific strategy and its effect on Britain's colonial possessions.5) The Soviet Union dropped out of the coalition with the defeat of Germany and Japan, while the United States and Britain went on to form the core of an anti-Soviet alliance.

Stages of a Coalition

FORMATION:

So, why form a coalition? At one level, the answer is simple. A nation seeks the assistance of other nations to accomplish a common goal. Coalition members may not believe they can accomplish the goal by themselves, or may seek to lessen the

"cost" (in terms of blood, treasure or possible international reaction) of accomplishing the goal.⁶ However, it is vital to keep in mind that while two nations may share an interest, such as the defeat of a common enemy, this does not mean that the overall war aims are identical.

In most respects, forming the coalition is the relatively easy part. In the Napoleonic Wars, for example, all the major European powers shared the common goal of defeating France. But their specific motivations and overall war aims varied considerably. Austria and Britain wished to return Europe to the "status quo ante" and maintain a balance of power on the continent. Russia, on the other hand, fought for revenge and domination and, ultimately, hoped to replace France (and Austria) as the dominant power in Europe. Prussia fought in order to reassert its independence. These various reasons for fighting had to be reconciled to form an effective coalition.

Further complicating coalition formation is that not all members may join a coalition for an obvious reason, for example, the defeat of a common enemy. They may be willing to participate for other reasons...to ingratiate themselves with a lead nation forming the coalition or to pay off old debts of one sort or another. For example, Portugal's participation in the war's

against France and Napoleon had less to do with direct national interest in the defeat of France and more to do with the degree of it's debt to England.

Smaller states also may be convinced to join a coalition because their participation is of special significance to the other members of the coalition. These states, in turn, may be able to finesse rewards for their participation far in excess of their actual contribution to the fight. As will become clear in the case studies, Sweden and Syria were each able to secure substantial benefits for their participation in the coalitions against Napoleon and Saddam Hussein, respectively.

Finally, it is worth remembering that non-members or socalled "silent partners" may be important to a coalition effort.

U.S. aid to Britain, for example, was vital to the latter's
survival in World War II long before the United States became an
active belligerent. In another instance, Russian support and
Chinese acquiescence played critical roles in assisting the
formation of the Gulf War coalition, even though neither supplied
any military forces to the effort.9

The other "silent partner" in a coalition is the common enemy. It is as important to understand an adversary's motivations and goals as it is the coalition partners'. The

enemy's interaction with each partner will affect the degree of participation in the coalition. Napoleon's obvious imperial ambitions and his willingness to overthrow the established order by, for example, setting his own relatives on the thrones of Europe, were vital elements in bringing additional members to the coalitions arrayed against him. 10

In sum, when developing a coalition, it is important to understand the different motivations of all actors. One cannot assume, as the United States often seems to, that U.S. goals are so obviously correct that all other nations must share them. In forming a coalition "...the key point is understanding the war aims of both enemy and ally." A partner's goals will effect its contribution to the coalition, how long and under what circumstances they will stay in the coalition, and will influence the conduct of the coalition's operations. An enemy's goals will effect it's relations with each individual coalition member and, in turn, the partners' relations to each other.

Case Study: Gulf War: 1990-1991

The basic facts of the Gulf War are recent and well known.

On August 2, 1990, Iraq occupied Kuwait. When Iraq appeared on
the verge of extending the aggression further south, Saudi Arabia

requested U.S. assistance. The United States, under a United Nations mandate, led an international coalition, first to defend Saudi Arabia and then to force Iraq out of Kuwait. On January 17, 1991, the coalition began the air phase of Operation Desert Storm. The ground phase began on February 24. By February 28, coalition forces had decimated the Iraqi army and liberated Kuwait. A cease-fire was declared and the war, or at least active hostilities, effectively ended.

Within that brief outline is a single amazing notion: the United States organized and led the largest international coalition since World War II. It was, by some measures, the most successful coalition of modern times. This accomplishment is all the more remarkable, perhaps, because many partners in the coalition (e.g. United States and Syria, Syria and Egypt) were barely on speaking terms. By the time the coalition launched its attacks, Iraq was virtually isolated diplomatically.

Of course, a perceived common threat formed the basis for the coalition. In this, Saddam Hussein's role as the "silent partner" was arch-typical. His record for deceit and his espoused desire to be the principal leader of a unified Arab nation, did much to overcome the reluctance of other Arab states to join a U.S.-led coalition. His history of willingness to

resort to military force, including chemical weapons, provided convincing evidence that a military operation was the final necessity to force him to leave Kuwait.¹³

The United States decided to act in concert with other nations for a variety of reasons. The effort enhanced U.S. domestic support for the action. It also reduced the potential for Iraq portraying itself as a victim of U.S. or Western "Imperialism". In short, the U.S. sought to act as "the leader of the world community, not as the Lone Ranger." 14

On August 2, at U.S. behest, the United Nations passed the first of twelve progressively stronger resolutions against Iraq. In so doing, the United States established a clear set of goals and war aims upon which to base the coalition. This, in turn, made it easier to recruit potential partners, as there was a general understanding of the coalition's goals.

The political situation in the region was very complex, but the support of certain actors was key. Foremost was the Soviet Union. As the traditional patron of Iraq and a member of the U.N. Security Council, Soviet support for U.N. initiatives was critical to building a broad-based coalition. This held true even though the Soviets never became active belligerents. Their participation, as a "silent partner" not only was important in

its own right in isolating Iraq, but it was important symbolically for other countries such as France, which "... could not appear softer than the Soviets." In return, the Soviets were assured of continued U.S. and Western support and aid in their efforts to restructure and revitalize their economy.

The other vital element in the coalition was significant Arab participation. This began with Saudi Arabia's request for U.S. assistance on August 6. Convinced by U.S. satellite photos that they were next on Iraq's menu, the Saudi's broke long-standing policy and invited the United States and other nations to assist in their defense. Egypt and Morocco quickly announced their support and provided forces. This added significant strengths to the coalition (denying Iraq a potent "anti-imperialism" rallying point against the United States.)

Syria was of particular interest. As a traditional adversary of the United States, Syrian participation was symbolically important because it reflected the breadth of the opposition to Iraq. They also shared a common border. Syria recognized its own importance in the matter and used it to good advantage. Syria promised forces to help defend Saudi Arabia, although they would not participate in the ground offensive against Iraq. By engaging in direct negotiations with the United States and other

Western countries such as Britain¹⁷, they broke out of a large degree of the isolation that they had faced for their support of terrorist operations. This, in turn, gave them leverage in efforts to arrange a comprehensive Middle East settlement.¹⁸

The United States convinced other key countries to support the effort against Iraq. Each had important contributions to make according their abilities and interests. For example, Turkey's geographical position next to Iraq was critical in both blockading Iraq and as a staging point for attack. In return for shutting off Iraqi oil pipelines and allowing bases to be used as staging points, the U.S. offered financial compensation and political support for Turkey's bid to join the European Union. 20

The United States persuaded yet other countries to contribute to the coalition, although their direct interest in defeating Saddam Hussein was tenuous and they would not or could not send combat forces. Germany, as a faithful ally of the United States and mainstay of NATO, supplied financial aid to Turkey and provided transport and non-combat support for other fighting forces. Japan, highly dependent on a stable supply of Middle East oil, and South Korea, desiring to prove its continued worth to its close ally, the United States, were persuaded to provide

money in lieu of troops. These Asian nations ultimately provided billions of dollars in financial support for coalition operations.²²

Two other "silent partners" were key to the process in different ways. First, China, as a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council, was an important factor in any strategy using the United Nations. China had traditionally opposed active U.N. intervention in the affairs of other nations and also had little direct interest in the Middle East. However, any Security Council measure had to have Chinese support, or at least neutrality in the form or an abstention. The United States effectively paid for Chinese tacit support by agreeing to end the isolation that China had endured since the Tien An Men massacre in 1989. The United States formally sent a delegation to China and received an official Chinese delegation. In return, China did not block any of the anti-Iraq resolutions.²³

Finally, there was Israel. In any matter involving the United States in the Middle East, the question of Israel was bound to arise. An Israeli attack on Iraq had the potential to fragment any U.S.-led coalition, as traditional Arab attitudes came to the fore. The United States avoided this possibility by recognizing the potential for problems and meeting them head on.

The United States preemptively discussed the matter with Arab coalition members and secured their acknowledgment that, if Israel were attacked first, it had a right to defend itself.²⁴

The Gulf War coalition is a study in doing everything right.

President Bush capitalized on long-standing personal contact to work with otherwise fractious partners. He understood the strengths and weaknesses of those partners. The coalition established clear war aims and goals at the very beginning of the conflict that represented a consensus. The United States secured appropriate contributions from each coalition partner and avoided problems, such as financial hardships to Turkey and Israeli participation, that might otherwise have become stumbling blocks. The United States also secured the open or tacit support of key "silent partners" such as the Soviet Union and China. Finally, the "silent partnership" of the enemy, Saddam Hussein's own intransigence, provided the "glue" necessary to the effort.

The Gulf War coalition accomplished all of it stated goals. It restored independence to Kuwait and significantly reduced the ability of Iraq to threaten its neighbors. It did so at an amazingly small cost in life and treasure. Saddam Hussein's tenacious grip on power and the fact that not all problems in the region were solved should not obscure that central fact. If you

are going to make a coalition, the Gulf War provides a shining example.

Maintenance

If forming a coalition is relatively easy, maintaining one is not. While 'getting partners' and 'keeping partners' involve similar problems and issues, they are not identical points. To repeat the obvious, to maintain the coalition, understanding the partners, their strengths, weaknesses and war aims is key. This kind of knowledge prevents misunderstandings and errors in expectations.

Once a coalition is formed, it may have a degree of natural cohesion. In many cases, states, having made a major decision to join a coalition, may be reluctant to change direction suddenly, recognizing the impact of such action on its partners and its future interactions with those partners. On the other hand, once formed, a coalition becomes an obvious strategic and operational center of gravity for an enemy to attack. During the War of the Second Coalition against France, for instance, Napoleon defeated his enemies individually while they argued among themselves. "Had there been unity of purpose and leadership, and a ruthless exploitation of their initial

successes, the allies might well have settled the issue before...Bonaparte returned to tilt the balance." Napolean tilted the balance at Marengo and Hohenlinden and the partners sued for peace one by one.

The actual prosecution of the war also can have a significant impact on maintaining the coalition. The decision, for example, whether to put forces under a common command or keep them separate, the engagement of these forces, and, of course, success or failure in battle, all impact the cohesion of a coalition.

Memories of near disaster in World War One, where the national partners fought (and were nearly defeated) under separate commands, encouraged the unified command arrangements on the Western Fronts in World War Two.²⁷ This, in turn, increased the cohesion of the latter partnership.

Generally, but not always, the partner fielding the largest force has the largest say in coalition plans. But, again, the need to maintain a balance among partners can effect these arrangements. In the Gulf War, the United States, as the country with the most forces and firepower, led the coalition. However, the fact that the Gulf War build-up took place in Saudi Arabia gave that country a large voice in planning and operations.²⁸

Moreover, the need to keep Arab countries as a viable part of the

coalition and the sensitivity of who would fight with and for whom had direct impact on command and control arrangements; e.g., Syrian and several smaller Persian Gulf state forces were under orders not to enter Iraq, which effected campaign planning.²⁹

Time is not always on the side of a coalition. The longer a conflict goes on, the greater the possibility that differences among partners may reassert themselves. Changing fortunes on the battlefield and other events such as a change in leadership or economic factors can alter the power relationships among the coalition partners or their war aims. This becomes particularly the case as the immediate common threat recedes.

In 1942, the "Grand Alliance" of World War Two was seen as a balance among the "Big Three." In the United States, there were even accusations that the British were manipulating policy and planning strategy for their own ends. 30 But, by 1945, it was clear that the United Kingdom was exhausted, while the United States had become steadily stronger throughout the conflict. By the end of the war, decisions were basically being made between the United States and the Soviet Union with Britain relegated to a subordinate position. 31 The Soviet Union began to raise its war aims and goals to match the positions held by its army and sought to dominate Europe. 32 The United States responded in kind to

counter Soviet moves. Henry Kissinger generalized this phenomenon:

as long as the enemy is more powerful than any single member of the coalition, the need for unity outweighs all consideration of individual gain. But when the enemy has been so weakened that each ally has the power to achieve its ends alone, a coalition is at the mercy of its most determined member. Confronted with the complete collapse of one of the elements of the equilibrium, all other powers will tend to raise their claims in order to keep pace.³³

Simply by changing the balance within the coalition or within a region, some partners may come to fear victory as much as defeat. In the last day of the Gulf War, as Iraq's power collapsed, there was a growing concern for maintaining Iraq as a coherent state. The Gulf States and Turkey feared that a total collapse of Iraq would leave a vacuum that Iran would rush to fill. These concerns played heavily in the coalition's decision to end the war without actually marching on Baghdad.³⁴

The final factor in maintaining a coalition, as with the formation of the coalition, is the ultimate "silent partner", the adversary. Enemy strengths and weakness and his interaction with specific members of the coalition shape the continued existence of the coalition. In both World War Two and the Gulf War, the horrendous actions of the Germans and Iraqis did much to reinforce the glue holding the coalition together, in spite of

the changing circumstances.³⁵ More reasonable behavior could have had a serious effect in reducing the unity of effort.

Thus, when working to maintain a coalition, it is important to remember that it is a dynamic process. Circumstances change and the relations between the partners, as well as between the partners and the enemy, change. The war aims and goals may have to be reevaluated in terms of changed conditions. The longer the conflict goes on, the more likely it is that significant changes may occur and need to be addressed.

Case Study: Anti-Napoleonic Coalition: 1813-1815

From 1792 until 1815 Europe was convulsed by a nearly nonstop series of wars stemming from the French Revolution and the rise of Imperial France under Napoleon. Time after time, coalitions formed under the leadership of one or another of the Great Powers only to suffer defeat and collapse. Filled with internal rivalries, lacking unified strategic goals and unable or unwilling to cooperate operationally, they went down to defeat.³⁶

However, by 1813, after years of nearly unending success,
Napoleon encountered disaster in Russia and finally appeared
vulnerable. This convinced most of the great and lesser powers
in Europe that there was a chance for success in united action.

The ultimate success in maintaining this final coalition led to Napoleon's defeat at Leipzig in 1813 and his final defeat in France in 1814.

Several elements were critical in maintaining this last coalition. First and foremost was fear of Napoleon (the "silent partner".) The certain knowledge that no single power had any hope of defeating him, was the glue that finally overcame the mistrust of the coalition partners long enough to make a successful campaign.³⁷

Next, after years of half-hearted cooperation and piecemeal defeat, the partners finally achieved a general agreement on unified strategic goals and both strategic and operational planning. At one level, Metternich successfully argued "the principle that the power that puts 300,000 men into the field in the first power and all others only auxiliaries." While the partners did not have a unified command, they did have a common campaign plan. Their strategy of avoiding battle with Napoleon (but engaging other French forces) until the entire coalition force could unite on the battlefield, finally defeated Napoleon at Leipzig in 1813.40

At another level, the battlefield victory brought the coalition to its most challenging point. If fear of Napoleon was

the glue, then Napoleon's seeming weakness acted as a solvent. In response to changing conditions, Russia began to think it could defeat France alone and started raising its war aims, proposing a post-war France that would be a Russian puppet. England and Austria feared exchanging French dominance of Europe for Russian. However, renewed Napoleonic success halted the Russian tendency to break away from the effort and reminded all the partners of their mutual needs. At this juncture, too, Austria's Metternich and Britain's Castlereagh combined to formulate a joint, clear set of settlement conditions to which all the partners agreed.

An example of the way that differing aims and goals must be accommodated to maintain a coalition is found in Sweden's role during this time. As a relatively minor power, Sweden brought a small force to the fight. But several combatants, particularly Russian Tsar Alexander treasured the symbol of Prince Bernadotte, a former French General, fighting against Napoleon. In point of fact, Swedish forces saw relatively little combat and Bernadotte admitted that "provided the French are beaten; it is indifferent to me whether I or my army take a part, and of the two, I had much rather we did not." But, Sweden was able to parlay its

continued participation into territorial compensation (i.e. Norway.)

As it was, keeping the coalition together was a near thing.

Metternich and Castlereagh found common ground and clearly
understood the strengths and weaknesses of both ally and enemy.

Austria, commanding the largest field army, and England, holding
extensive financial obligations on every member of the coalition,
combined and used fear of a resurgent Napoleon to hold Russia in
check. The agreed-upon war aims (France within "natural
boundaries" and a restored Bourbon monarchy) plus special
incentives to key partners like Sweden, gave this final coalition
a unity of purpose that had been lacking in all previous
endeavors. Finally facing a truly united Europe, unable to
exploit differences and defeat the partners individually,
Napoleon's fate was sealed. Waterloo was merely a footnote.

CONCLUSIONS

In forming and maintaining a coalition, the key is for all partners to understand each member's true war aims, their strengths, and their weaknesses. Finding a consensus of goals for the coalition as a whole adds substantially to the ease of its formation and its cohesion. Such understandings go a long

way to ensuring that the coalition will not fall apart at some critical juncture.

It is equally important to understand the goals, strengths and weaknesses of the enemy. The common opponent's role is so critical that he really is a "silent partner" to the effort. The relations between an enemy and each coalition member can vary widely. They must be recognized and taken into account individually.

Different nations bring different advantages and disadvantages to the coalition. The partnership of an influential "minor" nation may be as important as that of a "great power." The "great powers" usually will end up making most of the key operational decisions, but they cannot ignore the interests of other coalition partners.

Finally, it is especially vital for the United States, as a frequent lead nation, to remember that forming and maintaining a coalition is a dynamic process. The goals and aims of the partners and their relationships to each other, as well as to the enemy, are not static and immutable, but must be continually reassessed in the course of the conflict. These factors may be affected for good or ill by changing fortunes on the battlefield or by domestic events not directly related to the immediate

conflict. The longer the conflict goes on, the more likely it is that factors may develop to change the balance of the coalition.

There is almost a paradox in that it is when the coalition is close to achieving its goals that it is most difficult to maintain the coalition's solidarity. When the common threat recedes and individual members start looking past the current conflict, the inherent differences between partners are most likely to reassert themselves. Nonetheless, by constant review of the evolving situation, a coalition can be kept intact and contribute toward bringing a conflict to a successful conclusion.

5,174

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